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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ATHENS 001539

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [OSCE](#) [GR](#) [RS](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: GEORGIAN FM VISIT TO ATHENS: GREEK, GEORGIAN
READOUTS DIFFER

Classified By: A/POLCOUNS JEFFREY HOVENIER. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During her November 6-7 visit to Athens, Georgian FM Tkeshelashvili discussed with FM Bakoyannis and other Greek interlocutors problems with the OSCE observer mission in Georgia, the recent donors' conferences, the plight of IDPs, the Geneva talks, energy pipelines, and domestic issues in Georgia. Readouts from the Greek MFA and Georgian Embassy differed considerably in emphasis and details. The MFA stressed Greek agreement with many Georgian requests for support on OSCE and NATO issues. The Georgians saw the Greeks as largely in listening mode and voiced concerns about the Greek ability to withstand Russian pressure when Greece assumes the OSCE Chairmanship in January. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Georgian FM Ekaterine Tkeshelashvili made a 24-hour visit to Athens November 6-7 before heading to Paris for discussions with the French in advance of the November 10 GAERC and November 14 EU-Russia Summit. Tkeshelashvili met with Greek FM Bakoyannis in an office call and then at an official lunch. She also met with First Vice President of the Parliament Giorgos Sourlas; discussed topical issues with MFA NATO, OSCE, and CIS experts; participated in a roundtable with think-tankers and NGOs at the ELIAMEP think tank; and held a press conference. We received readouts from both the MFA and the Georgian Embassy, which agreed on the basic items of discussion but differed on important details.

VIEW FROM THE MFA

¶3. (C) Top MFA Georgia specialist Stella Bezirtzoglou of the A5 Directorate for the CIS Countries told us the Greeks expected the Georgians to make a push for NATO MAP, but in fact Tkeshelashvili did not raise MAP, focusing instead only on getting a "positive assessment" from NATO on its reform progress. The Georgian FM reportedly argued that they needed such an assessment as a positive message to the Georgian population and to offset Russian propaganda. Bezirtzoglou claimed FM Bakoyannis agreed to help Georgia get a positive assessment.

¶4. (C) On the OSCE, Tkeshelashvili complained about the problems the observers were encountering in trying to do their jobs in South Ossetia and Abkhazia because of Russian refusal to allow access. Bakoyannis promised that as Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE beginning January 1, she would discuss Georgia with Russia, and Greece would "do all it could to support" the OSCE observer mission. Bezirtzoglou, who is an astute observer of both Russia and Georgia, said the MFA believed the Russians did not want the OSCE involved in the Georgia issue and were following a classic "divide et impera" approach to split the OSCE.

¶5. (C) Tkeshelashvili reportedly said Georgia was very satisfied with the donors' conferences in support of her

country. Some of the funds received were being used to build new housing for the 35,000 new IDPs from the recent crisis (in addition to 200,000 IDPs from previous conflicts in the separatist regions). Tkeshelashvili was optimistic that all the IDPs would soon have housing. Work on infrastructure reconstruction was also progressing.

¶6. (C) On the Geneva talks, Tkeshelashvili reportedly said Georgia was willing to be flexible in allowing the participation of representatives from South Ossetia and Abkhazia -- but not in the capacity of representing state entities. The Russians, she said, remained intransigent on the issue.

¶7. (C) On other issues, the Georgian FM argued for pipeline security while also noting that Georgia was now receiving no gas or oil from Russia. On the domestic economic situation, Tkeshelashvili said the situation in Georgia was now bad, but Russia was still jealous because at least Georgia was still receiving some foreign investment while Russia was not. On the domestic political front, the FM talked about Georgia's ongoing democratic reforms, which FM Bakoyannis said Greece wanted to assist. Finally, there was some discussion of the situation of the Greek diaspora in Georgia (which during the Soviet period may have numbered as high as 100,000 but had shrunk to 10-15,000 following emigrations to Greece after the fall of the USSR).

A DIFFERENT TWIST FROM THE GEORGIANS

¶8. (C) Georgian DCM Zurab Aleksidze did not disagree with the
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general outline of Bezirtzoglou's readout but focused on different subjects as the thrust of the visit and had a different view of the Greek responsiveness to Georgian requests. Aleksidze said the main goal of the Georgian FM's visit was to assess Greek preparation for assuming the OSCE Chairmanship in January. Georgia was very concerned about the current situation of OSCE observers and their lack of access to South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Both the Russian and the separatists, according to Aleksidze, did not accept that the OSCE observer mission was necessary. Georgia, on the other hand, would not accept any "radical" changes to the OSCE mandate in Georgia.

¶9. (C) At the same time, Georgia had concerns about the OSCE beyond the immediate problem of the observers. There was no mention of Medvedev's latest proposal on a new security arrangement for Europe, and Georgia was worried that Greece would not be able to meet the expectations of both the Georgians and Russians in negotiations. Indeed, FM Bakoyannis reportedly herself said she was concerned about unrealistic expectations going into the Chairmanship. Otherwise, according to Aleksidze, the Greeks provided little on their views of the OSCE Chairmanship. The Greeks, Aleksidze said, were much more focused on the humanitarian question and the plight of IDPs in Georgia. Georgia appreciated Greek assistance but wanted to broaden the conversation to address political issues as well.

¶10. (C) On other issues, Aleksidze confirmed that there were discussions on the health of the Georgian economy and Georgia's progress on democratic reforms, as well as general discussion of energy pipelines. He said there had been some discussion of the NATO Ministerial in December, though Georgia was not expecting any breakthroughs. The NATO experts in the MFA D1 Directorate appeared to lack any new ideas. The Greeks promised to help with Georgian reforms, but, overall, the Greek attitude, according to Aleksidze, was one of "the ball is in Georgia's court." Finally, returning to the OSCE Chairmanship, in response to a question whether Georgia had faith in the Greeks to push the Russians on OSCE issues, Aleksidze replied "not much." The Greeks, he said, were not self-confident at the OSCE, and Georgia was very

concerned that they would not be able to stand up to Russian
pressure.
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